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Washington Times

Moon Paper: Significant D.C. Forum

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WASHINGTON—For those who monitor status in this town by tracking guest lists and reception lines—and many do—the seating arrangements at the recent White House Correspondents banquet offered hard evidence of the changing role of the Washington Times, the flamboyant newspaper financed by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

Last year, the highest-ranking Administration officials to grace the Washington Times table were the director of the U.S. Information Agency and the secretary of the Air Force.

This year, the journal Washington once dismissed as the "Moonie Paper" rated Atty. Gen. Edwin Meese III, National Security Adviser Robert C. McFarlane, former Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. and Energy Secretary John S. Herrington.

Circulation of 83,000

Over the last three years—and particularly during President Reagan's second term—the paper the Korean evangelist founded as part of his conservative global war on communism has become a significant forum in the world's most powerful city.

Although it has a circulation of just 83,000 and is losing tens of millions of dollars, the Washington Times has been embraced by the conservative movement; it is especially well read at the White House, where Reagan has given it his public endorsement.

"Everybody here (in the White House) gets it. Everybody here reads it," said Patrick J. Buchanan, Reagan's director of communications and a former syndicated columnist whose work appeared in the paper. "The Washington Times is taken seriously."

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Despite such controversial political activities as a campaign to raise funds for the Nicaraguan *contras*, the newspaper now is read out of necessity by liberals and conservatives, and monitored by other news operations because Administration sources leak exclusive stories to it.

Medium for Special Interests

Because of such leaks, the Washington Times was first with Administration reports that Soviet combat advisers had been spotted alongside Nicaraguan troops in areas of contra activity. It was also the first to publish allegations that House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.) had deliberately manipulated the date of a vote on aid to the *contras* in order to block the proposal.

The paper has even become a way for special interests—usually conservative—to shape the news agenda of other media, and stories that might be disregarded or run merely as part of larger stories elsewhere today are getting banner play in the Washington Times.

"Certain sources choose to give them exclusives," admitted Leonard Downie Jr., managing editor of the Washington Post. "On occasion, yes, we have followed those stories ourselves because they come from legitimate documents of a newsworthy nature."

By traditional business standards, the paper is hardly a success. The Washington Times' national edition, for instance, has just 9,000 subscribers. Advertising lineage in both editions is lean. And in its first 2½ years, according to internal documents, the paper lost \$150 million.

In its avowed political purpose of becoming a force in Washington, however, the paper has fared far better. The Washington Times was founded in May, 1982, as part of the Unification Church's "battle against what it sees as the ultimate enemy of human values and freedom—communism," according to a Washington Times promotional booklet.

Initially, suspicion existed over Moon's motives and the prospect of a controversial evangelical sect gaining political influence. Moon was convicted of tax evasion in 1982 and is now serving an 18-month sentence.

Suspicion Intensifies

Suspicion intensified when

found

that the paper was funded simply by businesses in which Moon associates had directorships. Later, when Whelan was fired over business differences with the owners, he charged that Unification Church members were asserting too much control.

Today, the Washington Times' new editor-in-chief, Arnaud de Borchgrave, says he "can live quite comfortably" with Moon's politics. He also says he agrees with Unification Church claims that Moon is a victim of U.S. "political persecution."

"The Rev. Moon is in jail because of his convictions, because he represents a worldwide anti-communist crusade," De Borchgrave said. "No question about that. . . . He is an anti-communist, and that seems to be a crime in our society today."

Today, the Unification Church's ownership is much less of a problem for the newspaper than it once was. Both conservatives and liberals say the newspaper shows little evidence of Moon's religious crusade—only his political conservatism.

In Tune With Current Mood

Moreover, the Washington Times' avowed conservative purpose and aggressive criticism of other media—especially the rival Washington Post—as too liberal have matched the conservative swing in Washington.

"Were there no move to the right, no Reagan Revolution, there would have been no position from which the Washington Times could have been nurtured," said John Buckley, former deputy press secretary to the Reagan campaign and now press deputy for Rep. Jack Kemp (R-N.Y.).

"Now, it has really become an important source of communications among conservatives," Buckley said. "It covers the conservative movement in detail and reports on things important to conservatives that might be overlooked elsewhere."

Most important, the paper has won Reagan's repeated endorsement. After reelection, for instance, the President granted his first exclusive post-election interview to the Washington Times, and said that he read the paper every morning. In a Rose Garden address last summer, he advised students

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